

4139 666 34
+
R E A S O N S

FOR SEEKING A

R E P E A L

OF THE

Corporation and Test Acts,

6
SUBMITTED TO THE CONSIDERATION OF THE
CANDID AND IMPARTIAL.

BY A DISSENER.

*Let all Bitterness, and Wrath, and Anger, and Clamour,
and Evil Speaking be put away from you, with all
Malice.*

PAUL.

L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR J. BUCKLAND AND C. DILLY.

MDCCXC.

R E A S O N S

FOR

R E P E A L

OF THE

Corporation and Toll Acts

SUBMITTED TO THE CONSIDERATION OF THE
COMMISSIONERS OF THE



By A. T. R.

Printed by J. G. & Co. 10, Abchurch Lane, London, E.C. 4.

1881.

L O N D O N :
Printed by J. G. & Co. 10, Abchurch Lane, London, E.C. 4.

REASONS, &c.

THE application which the Protestant Dissenters have lately made and intend still to make to Parliament, for the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, occupies a considerable share of the public attention. While the enlightened friends of civil and religious liberty wish us success, the minds of some well meaning people feel a degree of anxiety, lest injury should be sustained by the constitution and the church; and others loudly condemn our conduct, and say that we are already in as good a situation as we deserve. Such fears and alarms arise from a misapprehension of the subject: Let it be fully understood, and they will vanish. We earnestly wish the matter to be investigated by all; conscious that the more it is known, the more clearly will the justice of our claims be seen, and the greater support we shall have from the judicious and moderate of every denomination.

In order to give a full view of the subject, and to bring forward all the arguments that might be adduced, a large treatise would be necessary; but it would exceed both the leisure and patience, as well as the finances, of a multitude of readers. For such this pamphlet is designed; which offers them a brief statement of the case of the Protestant Dissenters, and some reasons for desiring the Corporation and Test Acts to be repealed. All that the author requests of the reader, is, to peruse it without prejudice, and in forming his judgment and deciding on the question, to keep the Golden Rule in view: Namely, "To wish that to be done to Protestant Dissenters, which he would wish to be done to him, were he in their place."

The Corporation Act was passed in 1661, the year after the Restoration of Charles the Second; and by it provision

is made, " That no person or persons shall for ever here-
 " after be placed, elected, or chosen in or to Corporation
 " Offices, that shall not have, within one year, before such
 " election or choice, taken the Sacrament of the Lord's
 " Supper, according to the rites of the Church of Eng-
 " land."*

This Act was made in a season of great heat and violence. Read the whole of it, and you will discover a total inattention to the principles of the English constitution. It inculcates with the obligation and solemnity of an oath, the doctrine of Passive Obedience and Non Resistance, a doctrine which however fashionable it might then be with those who wished to gain the favour of the court, is now universally exploded throughout the British empire, and seems in a fair way of having an asylum to seek beyond the bounds of Christendom. In the strain of this Act we have an example of the common adage, " That men are apt to run from one extreme to another."

The remembrance of recent confusions in the time of the Usurpation, and the effervescence of loyalty towards the new Monarch, of whom they had but a short trial, banished from their minds for a season, that regard for the constitution, which they as its guardians should have shewn; and which they afterwards displayed in an eminent degree.

Then they entertained a very different opinion of the Dissenters, and plainly shewed that they considered them as good subjects and fast friends of the constitution, by endeavouring to procure a repeal of the Acts that were unfriendly to them.

Among other instances of this kind, in the end of 1680, a bill was ordered into the House of Commons for a repeal of the Corporation Act. Soon after, it was read a second time, and referred to a committee. Just at that time a bill came down from the Lords, entitled, " An Act for distinguishing Protestant Dissenters from Popish Recusants." It does not appear that there was any division on either of these bills. But the passing of them was prevented by the sudden prorogation of the Parliament. The Commons having a short notice of the King's designs, employed the small space of time, in some votes dictated by the state of

* See Statutes at large, Vol. II. Page 549.

the nation. One of them is in these words: " That it is
 " the opinion of this House, that the prosecution of Pro-
 " testant Dissenters upon the Penal Laws is at this time
 " grievous to the subject, a weakening of the Protestant
 " interest, an encouragement to Popery, and dangerous to
 " the peace of the kingdom." The Parliament was soon
 after dissolved by proclamation.

The other Statute of which we complain, is called the
 Test Act. It was passed in the year 1672, the 25th of
 Charles II. and it was thereby enacted, " That all and every
 " person or persons, that shall be admitted, entered, placed,
 " or taken into any office or offices, civil or military, or
 " shall receive any pay, salary, fee, or wages, by reason of
 " any patent, or grant of his Majesty, or shall have any
 " command or place of trust, from, or under, his Majesty,
 " his heirs, or successors, or by his, or their authority, or
 " by authority derived from him, or them, within this
 " Realm of England, Dominion of Wales, or Town of
 " Berwick upon Tweed, or in his Majesty's Navy, or in
 " the several Islands of Jersey and Guernsey, or that shall
 " be admitted into any service or employment in his Ma-
 " jesty's household, or family, shall receive the Sacrament
 " of the Lord's Supper, according to the usage of the
 " Church of England, within three months after his or
 " their admittance in, or receiving the said authority and
 " employment, in some public church, upon some Lord's
 " Day, commonly called Sunday, immediately after Divine
 " Service, and Sermon."

Every Person not having taken the Sacrament as pre-
 scribed is *ipso facto* adjudged incapable and disabled in law
 to hold any of the above offices or employments, or any
 matter or thing aforesaid, or any profit or advantage apper-
 taining to them, and every such office, and place, and em-
 ployment is rendered void. Besides, if any person shall
 execute any of the said offices or employments without
 having qualified as required by the Act, " and being there-
 " upon lawfully convicted, in or upon any information,
 " presentment, or indictment, in any of the King's Courts
 " at Westminster, or at the Assizes, he shall be disabled
 " from thenceforth to sue or use any action, bill, plaint, or
 " information in course of law, or to prosecute any suit in
 " any

" any court of equity, or to be guardian of any child, or
 " executor or administrator of any person, or capable of
 " any legacy, or deed of gift, or to bear any office within
 " England, Wales, or Berwick upon Tweed, and shall for-
 " feit *five hundred pounds*, to be recovered by him or them
 " that shall sue for the same."*

The state of things at the time of passing the Act deserves attention. The King was suspected of Popery. The Duke of York, the presumptive Heir of the Crown, was a professed votary of the Church of Rome. Papists were indulged; and many of them were employed in some of the most important offices under government. The Penal Laws against them were suspended by a royal proclamation, contrary to express Acts of Parliament. An army commanded by a foreigner was encamped at Blackheath; and war was begun against Holland, the only Protestant state in Europe, from which England could expect support, in defending her religion and liberties. From the concurrence of these alarming circumstances, the minds of Protestants and lovers of their country were filled with consternation; and in direct opposition to the wishes and influence of the court, the two houses passed the Test Act, which, as its preamble declares, is, " for preventing dangers that may happen from
 " Popish Reculants, and quieting the minds of his Majesty's
 " good subjects." The effect of the Act was immediately felt. The Duke of York, Lord Clifford, and other Papists, resigned the offices which they held.

The Dissenters apprehend that this Act was not intended against them, but, as its preamble sets forth, against the Papists only. Indeed the Nonconformists who then sat in the house exerted themselves in favour of the bill, in order to deliver the nation from the danger of Popery. Alderman Love, a member of the house, a known Dissenter, publicly desired, that nothing with relation to them might prevent the passing of the bill; and deprive the nation of that security which the Protestant religion would enjoy from the Test Act; and he declared that in this, he was seconded by the greater part of the Nonconformists.

* See Statutes at large, Vol. II. Page 779.

This conduct was so acceptable to Parliament, that in the same session, and while the Test Act was depending, a bill was brought into the House of Commons, entitled, *A Bill for the Ease of Protestant Dissenters*. It passed the lower House, was carried up to the Lords, and there likewise it passed with several amendments. These amendments having given occasion to a conference between the two Houses, the King, apprehensive that it might prove injurious to the interest of the Papists, did, on the 29th March, 1673, adjourn the Parliament to the 20th of October following. In that session a bill was ordered in for a general Test, to distinguish between Protestants and Papists. The Parliament sat only fifteen days; and by being prorogued, the bill for the Ease of the Dissenters was lost. Next session the bill for a general Test was introduced, and having been read twice, it was referred to a committee: But before the committee could make their report, Parliament was prorogued, and the bill lost. Such a disposition towards the Dissenters did that very Parliament discover, which had passed the Corporation and Test Acts: And that it continued to the end to entertain the same favourable sentiments, is evident from an Act passed near the period of its long existence, enjoining a Test, not a sacramental one, but consisting in a declaration against Popery, which should allow Dissenters to sit in either House of Parliament, but should exclude Papists.

These are the two Acts of which we seek the repeal, and we trust with a great prospect of success. If Parliament in the reign of Charles II. exerted itself again and again to grant us relief; but was prevented by the King, who was generally supposed to be a Papist, and who was much under the influence of his brother; what may we not expect from Parliament under the reign of George the Third, a Prince who loves the Protestant religion, in a liberal and enlightened age, especially after the revolution of a century has proved us to be good subjects, and firmly attached to the constitution, and to the family on the throne.

In applying for a repeal of these Statutes, let none accuse us of factious and seditious principles. The following reasons in defence of our conduct, we submit to the judgment of every candid reader: And conscious of a good cause, we shall

shall not call in the aid of low scurrility, bitter invective, or violent declamation. These may operate on the ignorant and the bigotted, may please the ill-natured, and the zealot for a party, and may rouse to indignation, those who are stimulated by the heat of passion and not guided by the light of the understanding; but

*Non tali auxilio, non defensoribus istis
Res eget.*

Perhaps some, before they hear our reasons, may wish to know, who we are, and what are our sentiments as to civil government and religion. Their desire shall be gratified. We are not ashamed of our principles, and it may be the more necessary to mention them, as we are often grossly misrepresented, and see opinions charged on us which we detest. The reader cannot expect a full account in so small a space: but he will be able to form some idea of them, if we just delineate the leading features of Protestant Dissenters.

To begin with our Religious Principles, we cordially adopt the maxim of the great Chillingworth, when engaged in controversy with the Church of Rome, "That the Bible, the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants." It is ours. What we find contained in that book, we receive and believe: Whatever goes under the name of religion among others, if we cannot find it there, we reject, as an invention of men, and not the word of God. Creeds, Articles, or Confessions of Faith, we consider as the decisions of fallible men; and we peruse them with the degree of attention which we think due to those who compiled them. If they appear agreeable to the Scriptures, we receive them on that account. If they seem in whole or in part contrary to the Scriptures, we reject whatever does not correspond with our only rule of faith and manners. Every person, we think, has a right to read, and consequently to examine and explain the Scriptures for himself. The authority of the Pope to chuse a religion for us, and to impose it on our consciences, has, to all true Protestants, long appeared ridiculous. But if the Pope have no right, who gave authority to a Bishop, or Archbishop, or Council of Bishops, in England, at Nice, or at any other place on earth, to assume his place. He who says, their decrees are binding, maintains Popery still, though under another name. Belief is
de-

demanded without evidence. Let them raise the dead, or open the eyes of the blind, as the Apostles did; and we will give equal credit to their words. To assert that we should receive them, because they are agreeable to the Scriptures, is neither more nor less than returning to our principle, the right of private judgment, which empowers every man to examine for himself. This method, it may be alleged, will produce a great diversity of sentiments. It will: But that is always the consequence of freedom of enquiry; and no means hitherto devised, have been effectual to prevent it. There are Articles drawn up for regulating the faith of the Clergy of the Church of England, and they declare that they believe them; but it is an easy matter to name writers of that communion, in whose works there are all the gradually varying shades of Theological opinion, from Woolston who pitched his tent on the verge of the bleak wilderness of Deism, to Toplady who fixed his abode in the craggy cliffs of Supralapsarianism: Or if any wish for mitred heads, from Dr. Law the late Bishop of Carlisle, who took his station on the low grounds of Socinianism, to Dr. Beveridge, Bishop of St. Asaph, who soared in the higher regions of Calvinism. A diversity of sentiments is likewise to be found among us. If we think a person in a dangerous error, we endeavour by reasoning to convince him, and to bring him back to the truth. If he will not hear us, we leave him to the judgment of God; for to his own master he stands or falls.

Our congregations, like the assemblies of the primitive Christians till the days of Constantine, are entirely voluntary, composed of those who prefer our sentiments, mode of worship, and discipline. Our ministers, like those of the primitive church, are chosen by the voice of the people.— Their office is wholly confined to religious matters, to teach the principles of Christianity in public; and in private to instruct the ignorant, to comfort the afflicted, and to enforce by personal conversation, the doctrines and duties of religion. Their only weapons are prayers and reasoning: And they have no authority over us, but what they derive from our esteem of their learning, their piety, or their virtues. If a man appear and profess to be a Christian, we admit him into our communion, and he receives the sacrament with us. Should he afterwards deny the Lord that bought him, or be guilty of a crime, we exclude him. He may attend on pub-

lic worship; but he is not allowed to sit down with us at the Lord's Table. This is all the injury he sustains. He suffers no civil disabilities, he is deprived of no civil rights. We wish him to endure no temporal loss or disadvantage, as a member of civil society, from acting in a manner unbecoming a Christian. We should esteem it impious to call on the magistrate to inflict the slightest punishment on him. "Christ's kingdom is not of this world." Its rewards and punishments are of a spiritual nature; and we leave it to him to dispense them according to his pleasure. Obstinate transgressors, therefore, we consign to the righteous tribunal of Jesus Christ, before whom they must appear; and who will inflict deserved punishment on all apostates from the faith and holiness of the gospel. These are our sentiments as to religion. Surely they should not be formidable to any of the powers on earth. They interfere with no system of government: There is no *imperium in imperio*: They claim no temporal power: They require no force to maintain them: All that they ask is protection; and that they may not be injured by the rough hand of persecution. How unjustly are we traduced, when ignorant and ill designing men represent us as enemies to kings and kingdoms. But we are consoled under the accusation, by reflecting that the same charge was brought against our Divine Master: "If thou let this man go thou art not Cæsar's friend."

Our sentiments as to Civil Government are in unison with the spirit of the English constitution: And we have a profound veneration for the sacred structure which the blood of patriots and heroes has preserved from ruin, and has cemented and raised to its present lovely form. We are to a man the friends of civil as well as religious liberty: However much we may differ as to theological opinions, in the love of liberty we all agree. The doctrine of Passive Obedience and Non Resistance, which was formerly echoed loudly from the pulpits of Cathedrals, and sanctioned by decrees of Universities, our souls abhor. We approve and admire the saying of a man who according to Bishop Burnet suffered death in the reign of James II. "That he did not think the bulk of the people were born with saddles on their backs, and bridles in their mouths, and that a few were bootied and spurred, with whips in their hands, to ride them." It has been confidently asserted, "That we
" are

"are Republicans to a man." But he who says so defames.* An assertion more destitute of truth, the father of lies himself did never propagate. Were a man to go from one end of England to the other, he would not find more

* When there are different religious sects in a country, that which is most numerous and powerful will always be found more ignorant of the principles of the smaller body, than the smaller body is of theirs; but they will be able to propagate more extensively any calumnies to the injury of the inferior party; for having rank, power, and fashion on their side, these joined with the ignorance will procure them a ready belief.— Thus it appears, from the apologies for Christianity presented by the Primitive Believers, that they understood well the religion of the Pagans, which was then established in the empire; but the treatment which the followers of Jesus received from such princes as Trajan and Marcus Antoninus, and the account given of them in the writings of Pliny and Tacitus, plainly prove, that these men were grossly ignorant of the religion of the Christians. It is in this way that we are to account for the Dissenters being charged with the name of Republicans. Trace back the History of England for a hundred years, and you will not discover the smallest propensity in them, towards that form of government. Yet the accusation is brought against them with confidence. The matter stands thus. Amidst the confusions of the civil wars, the Presbyterians rose into power: But Cromwell soon got the mastery by his influence in the army, crushed all that opposed him, and modelled the government as he pleased. They lived peaceably under him, although his conduct was approved by few. Baxter told him to his face, that the people of England considered their ancient monarchy as a blessing. Cromwell's government is now usually called the Commonwealth: But in fact there is a thousand times more of democracy in the English constitution at present, than it possessed. Under the name of a republic, there was all the tyrannical spirit of despotism. The people had no share in legislation. Cromwell with the title of Protector exercised all the powers of an arbitrary monarch. His Parliaments were but a name. He made what laws he pleased; and by the help of his army which supported them, he carried them into execution, and forced all to submit to his will. In comparison of Cromwell, Henry the Eighth revered the English constitution.

Some think the form of government in the United States of America is a proof of the republican spirit of Dissenters. We have heard much of the saints of Boston; but it should be remembered, that the saints of Virginia and the Carolinas who are chiefly Episcopalians, and the saints of Maryland who are of the Church of Rome, all united in Congress, before the war commenced, to oppose the measures pursued in England, and afterwards united against her in arms, and that Saint Washington the American General was a member of the Church of England. Since the peace, Bishops have been consecrated for New England, New York, Philadelphia, &c. Does not this prove that there is a numerous body of Episcopalians in that country? After viewing this fact, to argue, that because Presbyterians and Independants in America favoured a Republic, therefore Dissenters in England do, is just as conclusive, as because Episcopalians in America have exerted themselves to establish a Commonwealth, therefore Episcopalians in England must love and desire that form of government, in preference to every other.

than

than one Republican among ten thousand Dissenters. We prefer the English constitution, as composed of King, Lords, and Commons, to all the Republics that now are, or that ever were in the world, since Tarquin was driven from Rome. Subjects better affected to government than Protestant Dissenters, and more loyal to their Sovereign, England does not contain: Nor do we fear that we shall be accused of boasting when we add, more peaceable and orderly too. For while we love liberty we detest licentiousness.— Let the Judges of the land, and inferior magistrates, ask of what communion the culprits are whom they condemn to suffer punishment for breaking the laws of their country: They will not find the same proportion of Protestant Dissenters, as of people of every other denomination in the kingdom, either for petty offences, or for crimes of considerable magnitude. In a word we assert, that to the civil magistrate all ranks and conditions of men both in church and state are alike subject; and none but he has a right to wield the sword of justice. The business of clergymen is to teach and enforce religion by reason, and argument, and prayer: But it is the office of the magistrate alone to protect good subjects, and to punish the crimes of those who are bad. Such are our principles. We wish them to be known. Now let the reader listen to our reasons.

We wish a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts because we look upon them to be an infringement of our civil and religious rights. The following reasons for thinking so, are offered to the consideration of the public.

Every good subject should have equal access to all civil offices of trust, honour, and profit, in the community of which he is a member. The reasonableness of this maxim will appear from considering the nature and design of a human or civil government. It is an institution formed for promoting the good of the whole society, by averting as many evils as possible from every individual, and by conferring as much prosperity, and as many advantages as can be attained. It considers men as rational creatures, united in society for the enjoyment of social felicity. Its design and office is not to teach men the way to Heaven, but to enable them to live happily on earth. It has no concern with the salvation of men's souls; but is instituted to watch over their persons and properties, to preserve their bodies, goods,

goods, and reputation in safety, and to enable them to enjoy without molestation, the sweets of social life. In dispensing rewards and punishments, human government considers men's actions as they are hurtful or advantageous to the community. It punishes crimes as injurious to society : It rewards meritorious actions not as acceptable to God, but as beneficial to the state. That religion is absolutely necessary to the welfare, nay to the very existence of civil society, has been acknowledged and maintained by the most able and enlightened politicians. But whence does the necessity of it to good government arise ? Wherein does its excellence consist ? In this only : Religion is the foundation of personal and social virtue. When it produces these effects, it answers the purposes of a human government.

In a constitution which is properly framed, and which has a regard to the welfare of the whole community, every citizen who is a man of virtue and a lover of his country should have equal access to public offices. In an absolute government this maxim has no place. There the despot selects, or rather takes from the mass of the people, a few whom his fancy prefers ; and by their aid, he rules all the rest with a rod of iron. The people are nothing. The monarch sits surrounded by his mutes, with his bundle of bowstrings before him, and dispenses death or honours wherever his caprice directs. Who would account this a model for imitation ? The maxim may not suit a tyrannical aristocracy, either with a nominal King as in Poland, or without one, as in Venice. There the administration of public offices is confined to the Nobles, and the body of the people is accounted a despicable vulgar, fit only to serve as beasts of burden to the great. But would such language be heard in England without rousing indignation in every breast ? No. England is the land of liberty. The English constitution is founded on the principle of the natural equality of man, and it calls the lowest citizen to aspire by virtue and merit to opulence and honours. These, in a free government, should be open to all ; provided they entertain no opinions civil or religious that are hostile to the interests of the community. If the gate of the temple of honour be not open to all, there is a partiality shewn without any just reason, and the rights of some are sacrificed to the gratification of others. The government does not, like a common parent, embrace all the children who are equally dutiful, with equal affection ; but has favourites who are caressed,

while

while others equally or more deserving, are neglected, or treated with severity. These weaknesses which take place in an ill regulated family, should have no existence in a free and good government.

It may be alleged, that particular descriptions of men or parts of the community have no rights, but what the state gives them. But I ask, had the people of France no right to their former free constitution because Richlieu spoiled them of their liberties, and Louis XIV. kept them in awe by his armies? Had the people of England no rights, but what Cromwell with his Rump and Barebone's Parliament directed by the army, chose to allow them? Had the people of England no right to shake off the tyrannical yoke of James II. because an obsequious Parliament in Charles II.'s reign had sanctioned the doctrine of Passive Obedience and Non Resistance? The position is unsupported by reason and equity, and cannot be maintained. If government was instituted for the advantage of a few, or a part of the community only, it might be defended; but if its great and fundamental design be the good of the whole, it is utterly destitute of foundation and falls to the ground.

That the best of human governments are imperfect, is universally allowed; and they may, from a variety of causes, withhold from some of the subjects their just rights. It would be easy to specify examples. But should not this evil be remedied? When the matter is represented to the legislative body, it becomes them to listen to the voice of those who think themselves aggrieved, as a good father does to the complaints of his children; and if they have reason on their side, their request should be complied with. To say that the constitution is fixed, and ought to remain exactly as it is now, is contradicted by every session of parliament. For is not the legislative body employed from year to year, in removing hardships which arise from the acts of former parliaments, in conferring privileges which were not enjoyed before by individuals, or bodies of men, and in dispensing more fully the blessings of equal liberty. Look back for a hundred and fifty years, and you will find, that during that space of time, the constitution has received very considerable improvements; and why should it be supposed now in a state of perfection, so as to admit of no change or addition without injury? May not the wisdom of parliament for centuries to come, remove defects that still subsist, yield to the claim of rights that are not yet made, and dis-

fuse

fufe a more equal enjoyment of priviledges and of felicity ?
 Prejudices die away, not all at once, but as it were one by
 one : And as the fun gradually enlightens the globe, and
 banishes the shades of night first from one region, and then
 from another, so true knowledge and liberal sentiments do
 by degrees only, free the mind from false opinions, which
 education, superstition, and tradition have rendered sacred.
 In the reign of James the First, if a person had said that
 witches and wizards ought not to be put to death, and that
 the acts in the statute book relating to them were cruel and
 unjust, he would have run a great risk himself of coming to
 an untimely end. But we now think it right that they
 should be allowed to live, without fearing the smallest inju-
 ry to man, woman, or child, from their incantations and
 their power. When Charles the First sat on the throne,
 the man, who would have stood forth boldly, and maintained
 by discourse or writing, that Protestants who dissented from
 the Church of England, should be permitted to worship God
 according to their consciences, without molestation or fear,
 and that this was their just right, was not in a very enviable
 situation. If Archbishop Laud could have got hold of him,
 and dragged him into the Star Chamber, he might be thank-
 ful, if he escaped with his ears cropt and his nose slit, and
 was not besides condemned to perpetual imprisonment.—
 But we now think him a blind man, who does not perceive
 the iniquity of such a conduct ; and an intolerant bigot, who
 would prevent a fellow subject and Protestant from worship-
 ping God according to the dictates of his conscience. And
 can we suppose that every prejudice is now banished from
 the mind ; and that there are not some yet remaining, which
 preclude certain subjects of the British empire from the en-
 joyment of their just rights ? Prejudices do still remain ; and
 the unwillingness of the legislature to grant the petition of
 Protestant Dissenters applying for a repeal of the Corpora-
 tion and Test Acts, is a proof both of their existence and
 their strength.

We are good subjects. Our religious principles teach us
 to fear God, to honour the King, to acknowledge no fo-
 reign jurisdiction either in ecclesiastical or civil matters, to
 live soberly and righteously, and as we have opportunity, to
 do good unto all men. From the influence of our political
 principles, we love the English constitution ; we love our
 country ; we have always been among its best and fastest
 friends, Some distinguished characters, who disliked the
 Pu-

Puritans on other accounts, have honoured them as the friends and patrons of civil liberty. One reason why Charles the Second persecuted the Nonconformists, was, because they would not subscribe to the arbitrary maxims of his reign. But especially we desire that the conduct of Dissenters may be strictly examined from the Revolution, when they obtained a legal toleration, to the present hour; and we can boldly assert, that during all this period which now includes more than a century, and has given the world full time to observe the operation of their principles, they have proved themselves as good subjects as any in his Majesty's dominions. Dissenters were unanimous in promoting the expulsion of James the Second, and the advancement of the Prince of Orange to regal power. Dissenters were to a man, the firm friends of the House of Brunswick, and exerted all their influence to raise George the First to the throne of Great Britain. Since that time, there have been two rebellions in the heart of the island, rebellions raised with a view to set the crown on the Pretender's Head. But where is the man of information and of integrity, who will step forth and say, "Protestant Dissenters fomented and encouraged the impious attempt." They were known to be so firmly attached to the family on the throne, that they were insulted by the disaffected party, and some of their places of worship were levelled with the ground. If you ask, who then were the Rebels? Examine the impartial histories of these events, and you will find that the rebels against George the First, and George the Second, were members of the Church of England and Papists; while the Dissenters here and the Presbyterians in Scotland maintained unshaken loyalty. We still retain the same loyal disposition towards our present gracious sovereign; the same firm attachment to the House of Hanover, with a lively gratitude to the excellent Princes of that line who have already swayed the sceptre; and the same ardent love to the constitution of our country.*

If

* Should it be alleged, "That our conduct during the American war is an exception;" we insist, that a body of people in the Church of England, twice as numerous as the Dissenters, were as much dissatisfied; and expressed their dissatisfaction as loudly as ourselves. We lamented and complained, which good subjects may do; but we never refused subjection to government. And while we complained in our private capacities, did not a considerable number of able and independent Members in the House of Commons, and many of the most respectable Nobility in the

If the design of our constitution be, not to exalt one part of the people and depress the rest; but equally to protect all, and to ensure to all, the privileges that belong to them; may not subjects who have acted in so laudable a manner for more than a hundred years put in their claim to be eligible to offices of trust, profit, and honour? Have they not a right to be placed on a level, in regard to civil advantages, with any other members of the community?

We seek a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, because we consider ourselves as suffering oppression by their continuance. In a free and well constituted government, no good subject should feel the heavy hand of oppression. We think that by these laws Dissenters do. If any deny it, we beg them to listen for a moment to what we have to say. The most obvious oppression consists in imprisoning or injuring mens bodies, and in spoiling them of their

the House of Lords, with the immortal Chatham at their head, reprobate the war, and the conduct of the Administration who carried it on, in as severe terms as we could possibly do. The event has proved that we were not mistaken. Lord North's Ministry spilt the blood of more than a hundred thousand of the human race; entailed above a hundred millions of debt on the nation; and severed thirteen colonies, and near three millions of subjects from the British empire.

* That this is the end of human government, every enlightened reader must allow. To suppose, that one important design is to give the major part, or rather the legislative and executive powers, the right of chusing a religion for the whole nation, and to make them the instruments of supporting some one mode, to the discouragement and oppression of every other, is a position which will meet with few patrons at the end of the eighteenth century. When I give my vote to a Candidate for a seat in the House of Commons, I entrust him only with my civil rights; but my conscience, and the power of chusing religion I reserve to myself, and delegate to no man. Is it becoming in a state to say to a million of its subjects: "We allow you to possess knowledge, wisdom, integrity, zeal for the public good, and a capacity of promoting it to a very great degree. But these, we have determined, shall avail you nothing: unless you conform to our mode in a religious rite, and bow when we bow, and kneel when we kneel, and repeat words in worship which we put into your mouth, altho' you possessed all the virtues of Jesus Christ himself, you shall not be permitted to hold any civil or military office." Such expressions would come with a pretty good grace from Rome, where the Pope and his Cardinals reign with all all the intolerance of priestly bigotry, and all the pride of conscious infallibility: but that they flow with dignity from the lips of the King, Lords, or Commons of Great Britain, and are suitable to the character of the most exalted personages among a great and free people who glory in their liberty the mind cannot be brought to allow.

goods: But this is not the only kind. Generous minds are concerned for the preservation of their character and good name, as much as for the safety of their person and property; and he who robs a man of these, injures him most essentially. If this be done by a superior whom he is unable to resist, and against whose accusations he is not allowed to defend himself, it is an act of oppression. In like manner, if a government, by any decrees of its legislature, take away the reputation of a body of men, and fix a stigma of reproach on them without just cause, it is guilty of oppressing that body. Such a judgment and conduct with regard to Protestant Dissenters, does the operation of the Corporation and Test Acts produce. They are pronounced unfit for every office of profit, trust, and honour. And is it not a most severe reproach to a body of men, that the law should proclaim: "As Dissenters you are unqualified for every office under government." What is it but to say: "You have not integrity, or capacity, or affection enough for your country and its constitution, to be entrusted with the lowest degree of authority and power." Is not this an oppression of character with a witness? And the more noble and generous the mind is, and the more feelingly alive to a sense of nice honour and un sullied reputation, the more painful must the oppression be.

To view the matter in another light, oppression may consist not only in the inflicting of evil, but also in the deprivation of good. We thank God that we are not oppressed as our forefathers were, by the inflicting of sufferings: We are not imprisoned, we are not fined, we are not ruined in our estates, for being Protestant Dissenters. But good subjects are not only entitled to a freedom from suffering; but have likewise a right not to be deprived of their privileges. This may be thought by some to be no oppression. But allow me to ask, if the father of twelve equally dutiful children who need his assistance, should divide his whole property among nine of them, and leave nothing to the other three, have they no reason to complain of hard and cruel treatment? The rest may say, our father has not ordered you to be imprisoned, or beaten, or to be deprived of what you can earn by your industry, why do you complain? It is without a cause. Let a man place himself in the room of one of the children, who are cut off from a share of their father's inheritance, and he will soon be sensible of oppression; and all the quibbling of a sophist will not be able to

con-

convince him, that his sufferings are imaginary, and his complaints unjust. For a body of men to be degraded by the voice of the law, and in the eyes of their fellow subjects without a just cause, is a situation truly humiliating. This is the situation of Protestant Dissenters, and involves in it an evident deprivation of privileges. They may be equal to their neighbours in every virtue that can strengthen or adorn society, and as well qualified to fill public offices; but they are condemned to an exclusion from them, and considered as unfit for holding places for which they are fitted by their education and rank in society. Were those who most loudly condemn us, to be put in our place, they would soon feel the hardship, and complain of an infringement of their privileges. If the name of persecution were given to it, some might account the epithet improper. But what is persecution, if not suffering an injury for the sake of religious principles, and from a regard to the dictates of conscience?

It may perhaps be asserted, that places of honour and trust are not the right of any particular man; and therefore Dissenters are not deprived of their rights, and suffer no oppression by being excluded from them.—But let it be remembered, that there is a wide difference between the actual enjoyment of an office, and a legal capacity of enjoying it. To the actual possession of an office, no man has a right till he be appointed by authority: But to a capacity of being chosen, every good citizen has a right, till he has forfeited it by a crime. No clergyman in England has a right to be a bishop, till he is appointed by the King as supreme head of the church. No lawyer has a right to be a judge, till he is called by the sovereign to that honourable station. But if the clergy and lawyers of Hampshire should, by an express statute, be declared incapable of holding these offices, they would soon discern the hardship of the case, and loudly complain that they were deprived of their just rights; that an odious distinction, without any reasonable cause, was made between them and the clergy and lawyers in other parts of England, greatly to their detriment; and that they could not but consider themselves as suffering unjust oppression. This is exactly the case of the Dissenters. They are not conscious that any of their fellow subjects exceed them in attachment to the constitution; and therefore think it hard to suffer legal disabilities without a cause. Perhaps we may be told; “The door of
“ pre-

"preferment is open to you, as well as to others: It is your own fault if you do not enter." But can a person be serious in holding this language? Let us suppose that in going towards the house where preferment is to be attained, two men should seize me, tie me hand and foot, and leave me lying on the ground. On attempting to rise, I find it impossible, and all my exertions vain. I cry out for help, and some friendly hand to relieve me. They who bound me, open the door, and ask me why I don't come in: The door is open, and there is room for me to enter as well as for others, and it is my own fault if I do not immediately come into the house. No man would suppose them in earnest: And if they themselves were sincere, we should have too much reason to call in question the soundness of their intellects. If instead of tying my hands and feet, they fetter my conscience with unjust tests and unreasonable demands of compliance as the condition of my entrance, they act a part exactly similar, and my situation is equally hard. If I was before under a natural, I am now under a moral impossibility of entering the house. Such is the case of Protestant Dissenters; and of this hardship they complain, and seek redress.

The oppression appears to us the more severe, as we are the only Protestants in his Majesty's dominions who feel its weight. In Scotland there is not, and there never was a Sacramental Test; and Episcopalians who are Dissenters there, are equally eligible to places of trust, honour, and profit, with the Presbyterians of the establishment; and nothing is required in order to the holding of offices, but the oaths of allegiance and abjuration. The Protestant Dissenters in Ireland, for near fourscore years suffered the same oppression with ourselves; but they have at last obtained compleat relief. In 1779, the Parliament of Ireland passed an act, which was virtually an abolition of the Corporation and Test Acts, authorising "Every Protestant to hold or enjoy any place, or office, civil, or military, and receive any pay, salary, fee or wages belonging to such office or place, notwithstanding he shall not receive, or have received the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper according to the rites of the Church of England, without incurring any penalties for or in respect of his neglecting the same." Will it after this appear strange, if English Protestant Dissenters think it hard, that they alone should wear the yoke? Shall England, long reputed the very asylum of liberty, retain

tain partialities and distinctions among her free born sons; which Scotland and Ireland (deemed far our inferiors in the knowledge of the principles of liberty) judge to be unreasonable.

Another circumstance has lately occurred, which makes our oppression more severely felt. France used to be considered as the land of slaves. The people felt their bondage: They cried to God for help; and he diffused among them the spirit of liberty. To the joy of every lover of mankind, they have lately asserted their just rights: And it is with a pleasure which cannot be described, that we see our good neighbours pulling down the enchanted castle of despotism, where millions have groaned under the lashes of lawless tyranny, and speedily yet firmly erecting the venerable structure of liberty in its stead. Broad and strong are its foundations: High may it rise: Long as the world lasts, may it securely stand; and may all the people of that extensive kingdom find shelter beneath its roof. We envy you not, but sincerely congratulate you as brethren on your noble acquisition, and cordially rejoice in your success.—No sooner had the shackles of despotism been knocked off, and the people of France had begun to form their constitution, than they saw the iniquity of confining the offices of the state to men of a particular form of religion, and excluding others who had an equal portion of virtue and capacity, because they entertained different sentiments on some points of theology, and chose to worship God in a different manner. Accordingly they have enacted it as a fundamental principle of their constitution, that every good citizen, “ though a Non Catholic Dissenter, of whatever denomination, has the privilege of being elector or “ elective, and may be duly called to every degree of administration without any exception, and that all Dissenters “ or Non Catholics are capable of all employments civil “ and military, as well as any other citizen.” Their conduct powerfully pleads our cause. If we have been accustomed to consider ourselves as superior in the enjoyment of liberty to every other nation on the face of the earth, can it appear surprising, if we regard our degradation as more humiliating than it was before; and if we seek and persevere to seek by every constitutional method, a complete redress. We call on all the lovers of liberty for their aid: We appeal to you if our petition be not reasonable and just. Some because they are of the party to which honours are annexed,

ex-

claim against a change. From them we expect nothing but opposition. They regard not the liberties of others, provided they themselves feel no oppression; nay more, as the oppression of their fellow subjects contributes in some degree to their exaltation, they stand forth as advocates for its continuance. Such have no objection to oppression, if others and not they be oppressed: And their minds would furnish proper materials for all the harshness of the tools of Eastern despotism. But do not imagine they are altogether insensible. They can be deeply moved by the tale of woe, and feel tender pity for those who groan under oppression, if they be but at a distance, and have no claims that interfere with their interests. How many pathetic speeches were made in the senate, how many mournful essays were seen in every periodical compilation, expressing the strongest detestation of the slavery of the Africans, and calling upon all who had a spark of humanity, to join in rescuing fellow men from bondage, and in conferring on them that liberty to which human nature has an unalienable claim. But when a petition is presented to Parliament, by a million of good and loyal English subjects, imploring deliverance from oppression, and the just rights of equal liberty, the very same men reject it with indignation, and load the petitioners with unmerited calumny. From such characters, all that we expect, is the condemnation of our conduct. But to you who wish for equal rights to all who have English blood flowing in their veins, to you who hate oppression not only when ye yourselves are the objects, but when others feel its weight who should be equally free, to you we submit our cause, and to your patronage we lay claim.

We wish for a Repeal of these Acts because we conceive them to be prejudicial to the best interests of the community. It will be allowed to be for the benefit of a state to have the power of calling to public offices, whether civil or military, every good subject who may be found properly qualified. Mens religious opinions, provided they be not hostile to society, do not stand in way of their fitness.— Monsr. Neckar, though a Presbyterian of Geneva, is as able a financier of France, as if he worshipped at Notre Dame; and Marshal Saxe, a German Protestant, who commanded the armies of Louis XV. was, as the Duke of Cumberland found to his cost, as able a General, as he could have been,
if

if he had received absolution from the Pope, and had believed all the decrees of the Council of Trent. One bad effect of the Corporation and Test Acts is, that they prevent government from bringing into office, men of talents who may object to receiving the Sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England, and rob the society of their service. To expect that among the subjects of a free state in an age of enquiry, there will be an agreement in religious sentiments, is just as reasonable, as to expect that they shall all have exactly the same countenance, and be all of the same size. If there must be a diversity of religious sects, what is the best method for a state to pursue in order to secure its safety and prosperity? Two methods are naturally suggested to the mind: Severity, and gentleness.

The first has had the most frequent trials. It has been the common way to establish the opinions of the major part of the people, as the national religion; and to exterminate all differing sentiments, and crush those who maintain them, with the heavy arm of power. But the attempt has always disgraced the hand which performed the office of executioner. It is to be regretted that our own country furnishes so many examples; and that the page of British history is stained with so many acts of severity, on account of religious opinions. Charles the First distinguished himself by this mode of conduct. A champion for uniformity, he would force the Presbyterian Scots to submit to Diocesan Episcopacy, and the English Puritans to retire into the bosom of the established church. But mark his success. The Puritans were exasperated by his severity, and the more disposed to join the cause of the Parliament against the King: And the Scots took up arms to defend their religion against his attacks, and first erected the standard of opposition which scarcely ceased to wave till the unhappy monarch's death. Charles the Second, not rendered wiser by the sufferings of his father, pursued his father's steps. His harsh treatment of the Dissenters in England will always be reprobated by every liberal mind: But the severity of the methods which he employed in Scotland, to procure conformity to the established church in the South, was never exceeded by any thing but the Spanish Inquisition, and some of the old Crusades. The wretched people after enduring long continued acts of the bitterest oppression and the most wanton cruelty, were driven to madness and despair: And twice they snatched up arms without an aim, but from the anguish of
their

their hearts; and many thousands of them were put to the sword. France tried the same method and with the same success. From the reign of Francis the First, to the time when Henry the Fourth was established on the throne, there were almost continual attempts to exterminate the professors of the reformed religion. Persecution produced massacres, civil wars, desolation of the country, and the destruction of a vast multitude of valuable subjects. Louis the Fourteenth in the plenitude of his power and pride determined that there should be but one religion in France; and that the whole nation should hold the same opinions with their King. The consequence was, that near a million of the most industrious of the people fled from their country, and carried with them their fortunes and their arts to enrich the nations around. From such a line of conduct good effects can never proceed. If the subjects who are oppressed for their religion, resist and conquer, the state is convulsed. If they resist and are overcome, the blood shed in the field or on the scaffold weakens the state by depriving it of persons who might have proved useful members of the community: If they suffer oppression without resistance, they either quit their country, and carry to another, their affections, their skill, and their wealth, to increase its prosperity; or remaining at home with discontented minds, they hate their oppressors, and seize the first favourable opportunity to throw off the yoke.

There is another way for rulers to treat differences in religion, and that is with gentleness and kindness. If they cannot prevail with their subjects to think alike, they may endeavour to unite them all in affection and good will; and this union will answer all the purposes to society of uniformity of opinion. Good will and affection will be most essentially promoted by giving those who differ from the established church, if their principles be not hostile to government, the benefit of a complete toleration, and by admitting them to a participation of all the civil rights to which good and peaceable subjects are entitled. It is a reproach to the rulers of mankind, that this method has not been more frequently employed; and that the page of history does not present more numerous and complete examples. But where it has been tried, the consequences have been always happy. Holland, from the foundation of the Republick, has displayed more of a spirit of toleration, than any other state in Europe. Either the Presbyterian church established there, has been more mild; or which is more probable, the magistrates, wiser

wiser than the priest-ridden monarchs of other countries, obliged the clergy to mind only their preaching and their prayers; and managed the whole civil government themselves. All sorts of Christians were tolerated from the beginning; and all were admissible to military offices. What injury has Holland suffered from this conduct? While other nations lay bleeding from the wounds of religious oppression, different sects lived there in perfect harmony; the Republick enjoyed internal peace, and received a considerable encrease of population, by presenting an asylum to those who were persecuted in other places, for conscience sake. Henry the Fourth of France, who possessed a generosity of soul, and a paternal affection for his people which is oftner commended than imitated, disdaining the idea of letting one part of his subjects trample on the other, on account of differences in religion, did, by the Edict of Nantes, grant to the Protestants, an equality in civil rights and privileges, with the Catholics of the establishment. Did France feel any bad effects? So far was this from being the case, that the kingdom which had for a long time before been torn by wars on a religious account, enjoyed peace; the people lived happily together; and during a century which was the term of the continuance of the edict, no sensible inconveniences were found to arise. Ireland has lately adopted a similar plan. Protestant Dissenters there enjoy the same civil rights with the established church. The time of trial indeed has been but short; but we hear of no bad effects resulting from her generous conduct. What on a short trial has not proved injurious to Ireland; what was found so beneficial to France, is all that we ask in our petition to the British legislature. Should they grant our requests, it will be no less agreeable to us, than it will be conducive to the best interests of England: For the path to which we point, is the path which a liberal and enlightened policy will pursue, as certainly leading to national prosperity and internal peace.* Among all the different sects, will be found

* It has been common for interested persons to draw out a long list of evils which a nation is said to suffer from a diversity of religious sects. But it will be found on enquiry, that the evils arise not from the existence of these sects, but from one attempting to crush the rest. Disputes may occur about the truth and superior excellence of their several systems. But if the magistrate have good sense enough to let them alone; instead of flying to the sword, they will betake themselves to pen, ink, and paper, and write till they are tired, and then seek repose: But the state will suf-
tain

found men of talents eminently qualified to fill important offices in the state with honour to themselves and benefit to the public. It must then be for the advantage of a country to have its constitution so formed, that the rulers may have it in their power to call forth such men into stations of national utility. Had the *maff* been made a test in France, that kingdom would have been deprived of the abilities of the great Duke of Sully, a more able and upright minister than whom England could never boast; and of the services of Turenne in the field, at the time when he was appointed to command their armies, which he so often led on to victory and conquest. Should the great Mr. Howard tell the inhabitants of the countries which he visits, that the laws of his native land are so framed, that he as a Protestant Dissenter cannot enjoy the meanest office under government, cannot serve in the army or navy, cannot be a magistrate or a judge, surely they will not form very exalted ideas of a constitution which excludes such a man from appearing in a public capacity; nor will they be influenced to think that the public good is the object which it has in view. The

tain no injury whatever. Can any one point out the evil that England has suffered from the theological controversies which have been agitated for these fifty years past? Indeed a diversity of sects is in many respects a benefit to a community. I may venture to assert without fear of contradiction, that in countries where different religious sects are tolerated, there is more knowledge of religion, more learning, more patriotism, more virtue, and more true piety, than where the whole nation professes the same mode of faith: And the superiority is owing to their diversity. England now with all her various sects, has an unspeakably greater measure of these good qualities, than she had four hundred years ago, when there was but one form of religion; or than Spain at present possesses, notwithstanding the boasted uniformity in her theological system. Nor will this appear strange to those who understand the nature of religion. Its efficacy on the mind does not arise from an uniformity in external acts, rites, and ceremonies. What makes a good man, and a good member of society, is the influence of the grand moral principles of natural and revealed religion on the heart. As to a man's standing or kneeling while he says his prayers, worshipping God in a cathedral or a barn, hearing a parson officiate in a surplice or a gown, in a Geneva cloak and band, or without any external badge of clerical distinction; these of themselves have no more efficacy to form the soul to goodness, than a green coat has to make him that wears it wise, or a cocked hat to make him brave. By all the religious sects in England, the being and perfections of God, his moral government, the obligations of his creatures to obey his commands, and a future state of rewards and punishments are taught, illustrated, and enforced. And these principles have the most direct and powerful tendency to make men good parents and children, good masters and servants, good neighbours and friends, in a word good subjects and good members of civil society.

good

good policy as well as the equity of such a regulation may be justly doubted. Indeed candid men will allow, that the larger the field of choice is, from which the rulers may select men for public offices, the more likely they are to find persons properly qualified. Confine ecclesiastical honours and dignities to those who will comply with the terms required by the laws relating to the established religion: But let civil offices be open to all good subjects. Let England adopt the sixth article of the declaration of rights in France, which contains the dictates of reason and justice: "That all citizens being equal in the sight of the community are equally eligible to all honours, places, and employments, according to their different abilities, without any other distinction than that which is created by their virtues and their talents." The happy consequence will be, discontents arising from neglect and oppression will cease; envy at others who monopolize dignities to themselves will vanish; every member of the body politic partaking of its due rights and honours will feel its interest and concern in the common prosperity, and use its most strenuous endeavours to promote the good of the whole; and the nation at large will reap the most solid and lasting benefit.

We seek a Repeal of these Acts with the greater confidence, as we are fully persuaded, that it would not prove in the smallest degree injurious to the constitution. If a repeal appeared to us likely to deface the sacred edifice, or to endanger its fall, we would rather suffer many and great inconveniences than ask it. But how it should prove injurious we cannot perceive. Some relations are more obvious than others; but what relation there is between affection to the constitution, and receiving the Sacrament in a kneeling posture as a qualification for an office; or between disaffection to the constitution, and refusing to kneel at the Sacrament on that account, our eyes cannot discover. It would be easy to point out a variety of instances, from the Restoration to the present time, when Dissenters as a body have displayed the firmest attachment to the constitution; while a great many Episcopalians have discovered an evident disaffection. It has always been accounted a criterion of love to the constitution to have approved and promoted the glorious Revolution. But is it not a certain fact, that while the Dissenters here and the Presbyterians in the North testified the warmest approbation and the most cordial acquiescence

escence in the government of William the Third, the Episcopalians in Scotland to a man opposed it, hugged their chains, and prayed fervently for the success of James who, the Parliament of that country declared, had forfeited the throne by acts of tyranny? And did not some dignified clergymen of the Church of England, and not a few of inferior station, and many of the laity of her communion, though at first they fell in with the majority of the nation, soon discover an aversion to the government, the free government established by the people, and hesitate or refuse to take the oaths which were deemed necessary for the peace of the community? To have been strenuous for the accession of the House of Hanover to the British throne, has been always thought to discover a love to the constitution. The English Dissenters, to whom we may add the Scotch Presbyterians, claim the merit of ardent zeal for that important event, with which the continuance of civil liberty, and I might add the Protestant religion were so closely combined. But did not all those in the North who receive the Sacrament, kneeling, and many of those who do so in the South, favour the measures of the court? Did not all the Episcopalians in Scotland, and many of that communion here, discover greater fondness for a Popish Pretender than for a Protestant Prince? To be told, that we wish to destroy or injure the constitution, shocks not only our reason but our feelings; when we are conscious that we love it, and would exert ourselves to the utmost, in order to preserve its purity and strength. Will it be said, that the constitution consists of two parts, one relating to the church, and the other to the state: * That though we may love the civil,
we

* "The constitution in church and state," is a common mode of speaking, but not very accurate. It perhaps arose from that precedence which the courtesy of England gives to churchmen and church things. The constitution defines and regulates the various rights and duties pertaining to all the members of the community. In propriety of speech, it consists of many parts. For instance, one part of the constitution relates to the possession of real and personal estates; a second relates to manufactures; a third to commerce; a fourth to the army; a fifth to the navy; a sixth to religion. Several other parts might be mentioned. The part relating to religion contains two branches, the one is the establishment of a certain mode of belief and worship, of certain persons to officiate according to the forms prescribed, and a delineation of their rights and obligations. The other branch conveys, to those who dissent from the religion established by the state, certain privileges, and requires certain duties in return. So that the church, instead of being an ally to the state, and entering into an agree-

we are enemies to the ecclesiastical part of the constitution; and it would receive a material injury. As this is a common and popular objection we are willing to meet it; and we add that,

A Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts will not prove detrimental to the established church. We profess in the sincerity of our hearts, that by our application to Parliament, it is not our design to injure the Church of England; nor can we conceive how a repeal of these laws would operate to her hurt. Were they to be repealed tomorrow, it does not appear that it would make one Dissenter more than there is, or one Churchman less: Nor do we see how the Church of England would be affected either in regard to her emoluments, her safety, or her reputation.—A repeal of these acts would not lessen the emoluments of the church. Her Bishopricks, her Deanries, Prebends, Rectories, and all the various dignities remain exactly the same as before. Ecclesiastical preferments flow just in the same channel. There must be the same subscriptions and qualifications for all the degrees of the clerical office that

agreement with it, and forming a league for mutual benefit, is only a creature of the state, like the army and the navy, or any other part of the constitution. The church may be considered as one of the children of the state, over which the state has all the weight of parental authority, and may improve, alter, or amend, as circumstances require. Our dissenting from this establishment is no proof of our dislike to it as a part of the constitution, it shews only a diversity of taste which is apparent in the other branches without reproach. One man says, "I'll be a soldier, for I hate work, and the sea." Another says; "I will not be a soldier, for I dislike the idea of being bound for life: I will be a sailor; and when the ship is paid off, I shall be a free man." A third says; "I will neither be a soldier nor a sailor, for I do not chuse to be subject to martial law: I am determined to be a manufacturer." A fourth says; "I have no liking to any of these employments; I prefer agriculture, and the life of a husbandman." These different judgments are not considered as a dislike to the constitution, or as the smallest indication that if it were in their power, they would oppose and annul what the constitution has established for the regulation of the army, the navy, and commerce. So it is with Dissenters in regard to the church. That mode of religion which the constitution allows and approves, but without annexing to it any emoluments and dignities, they prefer to those tenets which the constitution has established, and to which it has added pecuniary advantages, as to the other servants in the pay of the state. And as a man who does not chuse to be a soldier or a sailor, neither thinks of destroying nor of injuring the army or navy; so Dissenters, tho' they differ, do not entertain the smallest idea of injuring the established church.

are

are now required : And Dissenters are at as great a distance from the priesthood as they ever were.

Nor would the safety of the church be in the smallest degree endangered by a repeal. Dissenters would still remain in such a situation, that they could not ; and if they could, we hope would not injure the church. The Dissenters could not endanger its safety. To suppose that they will then rise and destroy it by force of arms, seems, in the present state of society, as visionary a scheme as any that was ever presented to the playful imagination of the Knight of La Mancha. Or will it be suggested, that when the Dissenters get into power, they will exert it in order to depress the church. This proceeds on the supposition, that a great many of the Dissenters will fill offices under government. But we must suppose something like enchantment to take place, before such a number of them can acquire power in the state, as will enable them to do the church an injury.—The King and Royal Family, the nobility, most of the gentry, and a great majority of the people belong to the established church. Consequently by far the greatest part of public offices must be held by persons of that communion : And the Dissenters who are employed under government, must be in comparison very few. Besides, they must be in general called into office not by members of their own body, but by the voice of those who belong to the Church of England, who when they chuse, can easily exclude them ; and they may on all occasions of national importance be easily controuled by the superior power of the church, both in the legislative and executive departments. So that the fear, lest they should obtain an excess of power, seems altogether imaginary. — But why should it be supposed that we are inclined to do an injury to the church ? That because we differ from it, therefore we must wish to injure it, is an inference that can be drawn only by those who feel a similar disposition in the depravity of their own hearts. The clergy and laity of the Church of England differ from us, just as much as we do from them. But shall we conclude, that for that reason they wish to injure us ? No : We should account him guilty of the blackest calumny who would assert it ; and we should be ashamed to hold up our faces to the world, if we maintained sentiments so expressive of a mean, dastardly, and ungenerous soul. Many Dissenters have been in office : In some corporations they have had considerable influence. But has any thing been

attempted there injurious to the church? Have its ministers had reason to complain of disrespect, or of an infringement of their rights? Should the test be repealed, the good will of the Dissenters toward the establishment will be much increased: They will have no just cause of complaint remaining, and they must admire the amiable spirit which the church displays in freeing them from a painful burden. There may be among the Dissenters, as there are in all large bodies of men whether civil or religious, some unreasonable persons on whom this benevolent conduct would have no effect. But we are confident, with regard to the generality of the Dissenters, that the repeal of these acts would unite them more strongly in affection to the established church; and would rapidly encrease that spirit of harmony and good will which, we hope, has been gradually advancing between the Church and Dissenters for a century past, and which we wish to see carried to such a height of fraternal love, as utterly to extinguish every latent spark of jealousy and dislike that may yet remain.

These acts have been called the bulwark of the Church of England: But if with any degree of justice, may be justly doubted. To conclude, that because the church has enjoyed security ever since these laws were enacted, therefore she is indebted for it to them, has nothing more of argument in it, than that because the church has been in safety ever since the cross was erected on the top of St. Paul's, she has that holy figure to thank for her secure and happy state.—The true reasons of the real security of the church could easily be assigned; but a person would not be greatly out as to argument, if he should maintain, that the influence of these two causes are nearly the same. If what is esteemed a bulwark, affords no proof that a man either understands, approves, loves, or will support the church, there is certainly a *misnomer*; and the fancied bulwark proves a wall of chaff. Will it be said by the warmest advocates for the Hierarchy, that every man who comes to qualify for an office, understands the constitution of the church? All that he may know is, that he must kneel at the altar while he receives the bread and wine. In short, he who candidly and impartially views this part of the subject, will acknowledge that with respect to bad and unprincipled men, the receiving of the test proves nothing: For they will overleap the bulwark with the greatest ease. Their conduct shews that they love the place which they have obtained; but not
that

that they love the church. As to good men who are influenced by a principle of integrity and virtue, all that you can possibly infer from their conduct is, that they judge it not unlawful to receive the Sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England; and he who would further conclude, that they likewise approve, love, and would support her constitution, draws an inference which has no premises to support it. For a century past, there have been in France many persons fond of liberty who detested in their hearts the despotism that prevailed. They however conformed to the government of the country: But who reckons it a proof of their affection to the despot and his tyranny? It was stern necessity alone which forced them; and while they complied with the established form, they hated it with a perfect hatred. Mark well this vaunted bulwark of the Church of England; and instead of admiring its strength, the more narrowly you view it, its weakness will more manifestly appear.

It is probable that some may object. "Say what you will, we know you hate us: We can prove you to be enemies: Look back to the days of Charles the First, and see how your ancestors treated the church and the King." It is well if a man can answer for himself, without being obliged to answer for the conduct of his remote progenitors. However we will honestly meet the charge. Of many of the actions of which they are accused, we are convinced from the impartial annals of the times, that they were not guilty.* But we likewise frankly acknowledge, that the Presbyterians and Independents, when they got into power, acted in a very culpable manner; and betrayed the same intolerant spirit which they had so loudly com-

* The civil war was occasioned by the tyranny of the King and the Clergy; and its object was a redress of grievances, and the recovery of rights and privileges. The men who first opposed the King in the House, and afterwards in the field, were members of the Church of England. Neither Pym, Hampden, Hollis, nor the others of the greatest note were Presbyterians. They were good Churchmen. Essex who at first commanded the army of the people, was a strenuous Episcopalian. The power gradually passed from the parliament to the army: And it was in direct opposition to the warmest remonstrances of the Presbyterians, that Cromwell and his troops put the King to death. It was a deed generally detested through the nation. The cause of this odious action is not to be sought for in a difference of religious sentiments, but in the lust of ambition and a desire of safety. England could not contain both Charles and Cromwell.

plained of, and so severely felt before: We without reserve condemn their conduct. Our sentiments with regard to liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment are totally different from theirs. None will have reason to be displeased, if we reply to this charge by one precisely similar, and desire gentlemen of the establishment to look farther back to the reign of Elizabeth, James the First, and the former part of Charles the First's. There you will see Archbishops Parker, Whitgift, Bancroft, and Laud employing all the power of the church and soliciting and exerting the power of the state to oppress the Puritans, and make their lives bitter by cruel persecution. Had their deeds of severity been executed on Protestants by Popish Prelates, a book of martyrdom would have been written on the subject. The unhappy Puritans are not allowed to live peaceably either in the church or out of the church. Some hundreds of able and faithful ministers were deprived of their livings; and when driven out of the church, they were not permitted to live unmolested and to preach as Dissenters; but many of them were forced to abscond, many of them were cast into prison, and others were under the necessity of leaving their country and fleeing into exile. This was the conduct of the Church of England towards the Puritans previous to the civil war. But what was these men's offence? Were they drunkards, or sabbath breakers, or swearers, or ignorant, or inattentive to the duties of their office? Far from it: More diligent and faithful ministers England could not boast. With what grievous crimes then were they charged? Their iniquity consisted in this, that they disliked some of the ceremonies, would not wear copes and hoods and tippets, and bow towards the altar and the east, and read and recommend the Book of Sports. After the nation, in which the Presbyterians possessed the chief power and influence, had recalled Charles the Second, our forefathers enjoyed a short gleam of favour on account of their services, and then their sufferings again began. By the Act of Uniformity two thousand ministers were ejected from their livings, because they could not retain them with a good conscience, on account of the oaths that were imposed; and that act was framed and eagerly hurried on by the chief dignitaries of the Church of England. Ecclesiastical history cannot furnish such an instance of cruelty in excluding so many ministers from usefulness and the means of subsistence, as this of which the establishment has to

boast. If you wish to know the character of these two thousand ministers, read it in the words of a man who cannot be suspected of partiality, and whom every lover of letters and of virtue must revere: "Bartholomew Day was fatal to our church and religion, by throwing out a very great number of worthy, learned, pious, and orthodox divines, who could not come up to some things in the Act of Uniformity." You will allow that I could not mention a higher or more respectable authority, when I inform you that this was the judgment of the great Mr. Locke.—As if it had not been sufficient to deprive them of their benefices, and reduce them to penury, one oppressive law was framed after another to harass them and make their lives wretched, and to crush the people who had adhered to them; and many of the clergy were the most forward to procure those laws, and exerted themselves most strenuously to see them put in execution. Such, except a few short intervals, was the state of the Nonconformists from the Restoration to the Revolution. The greatness of their sufferings may be judged of from what is mentioned in Neal's History of the Puritans, vol. 4, p. 554. "An estimate was published of near 8000 Protestant Dissenters who had perished in prison in the reign of Charles the Second. By severe penalties inflicted on them for assembling to worship, they suffered in their trade and estates, in the compass of a few years, at least two millions; and a list of sixty thousand persons was taken who had suffered on a religious account betwixt the Restoration and the Revolution."—So that if we take the whole of the English history into view, it will plainly appear, that the Dissenters have suffered far more from the Church, than the Church ever did from the Dissenters; that the Church's little finger has been heavier than the Dissenters loins; and that if we chastised her with rods, she has chastised us with scorpions. Let none mistake our meaning: We do not mention these things to upbraid the Church of England. We only produce them in reply to the charge that is brought against us, and to shew that if the conduct of our forefathers merited censure, the conduct of the Church of England both before and afterwards was at least equally reprehensible; and that it is with a peculiarly bad grace that the violent deeds of the old Puritans are displayed by a member of the established church. Far be it from us to charge gentlemen of the establishment with the persecuting spirit which their ancestors did formerly pol-

possess: And we are free to declare, that we solemnly disavow the intolerant principles which were held by the Presbyterians of the last century. If it should still be asserted, as it frequently is by illiberal minds, that if we had power in our hands, as bad a use would be made of it as before; the charge may be retorted with equal force: Would the Church, if they had Laud's power, employ it in the same way? We trust she would not. Candour would dictate the same judgment in regard to us. The avidity and zeal with which the evil deeds of the old Presbyterians are circulated, while the moderation of the Church of England is extolled to the skies, gave occasion and birth to these unpleasant hints. We solemnly profess that we take no delight in unveiling the iniquities of other denominations of Christians. Every sect has deeds of intolerance and oppression to blush for, which it may justly wish to be expunged from the page of history. The religion of Jesus has been too long exposed to reproach, by the behaviour of contending parties, who, while they laid claim to the Christian name, treated each other with cruelty, envy, or contempt. It is full time for such a conduct to cease: And we should at last begin, with a true spirit of emulation to strive, which sect shall display in the most eminent degree, that candour, humility, meekness, benevolence, and charity, which the Gospel does so frequently enjoin, and so forcibly recommend.

The Repeal of the Test would not prove injurious to the reputation of the church. To grasp at all honours with an avaricious hand, to the exclusion of every one else, confers no fame either on an individual or body of men: The path to reputation is by generously admitting others to a participation of the most valuable privileges.

It is dishonourable to a church to seek to be supported by pains and penalties, and exclusive civil privileges. The greatest and most inveterate enemy of the Church of England could scarcely utter an expression more derogatory to her honour, than that she needs the Corporation and Test Acts in order to her security. Can she not stand on the basis of her own institutions? Has she not the most able advocates to plead her cause? Has she not on her side the profound erudition of the Universities, the learning and piety of her Bishops and dignified Clergy, and the holy lives and fervent zeal of her Parochial Ministers? With such
de.

defenders, what has she to fear? The Kirk of Scotland has been in safety without a Test. The Church of Ireland now enjoys security while she rejects its aid. But what is more to the purpose, the Church of Christ has stood always firm without needing the support of any civil prop. Is it to the honour of the Church of England that she should proclaim herself in danger of falling, if the Parliament of England remove the buttress of the Test? It is astonishing that the members of that communion should make a declaration so little to their mother's credit. We should account it calumny to be told, that the cause of the Dissenters must be supported by laying those who differ from them, under civil disabilities. We need them not: We have subsisted for more than a hundred years without their aid, and on the whole, without decrease of numbers. Do not the members of the Church of England think their mode of religion at least equally good, and consequently as able to support itself?*

Perhaps it may be said that the Church has a right to civil honours for her members, as a recompence for the service that she renders to the state. If she bore all the burdens, she might claim all the honours. But this is not the case; for Dissenters bear their full proportion of the weight. Here then they have no exclusive right. In the reign of the Stuarts many of the clergy promoted the arbitrary maxims of the court, by preaching up the divine right of Kings, and the duty of subjects to give unlimited obedience under pain of damnation. Did that conduct found a sole claim? The church now is far from such a spirit. We know of

* An objection has frequently been started, "That alterations are dangerous, and should be avoided." But it must be obvious to all that this precludes every improvement whatsoever. If the objection be good at present, it must have been equally good three hundred years ago: And had it regulated the conduct of the nation, we must now have been telling our beads and sprinkling ourselves with holy water. If an alteration will not be of service, let it not be made. If it be likely to be attended with material benefit, let it by all means take place. Timid and designing men will exclaim against it, and cry "the church is in danger." But it is a false alarm. When the Dissenters obtained toleration, Sacheverel raised this mournful cry to the great disturbance of the nation. When the occasional Conformity Bill was repealed, the cry was repeated. When Dissenting Ministers obtained freedom from subscription to the articles of the church, a few raised it; but with a feeble voice, and nobody regarded them: But what real injury has the church sustained from these? None. Equally harmless in its consequences would the repeal of the Corporation and Test acts be found.

no way in which she can be of service to the state; but by inculcating those principles which make men good Christians, good subjects, and attentive to the practice of every virtue. If this be the service that she renders, (and we can conceive no other) then every teacher of religion among the Dissenters may put in a claim for his congregation, from the service that he does the state; and we hope we can say with truth, that the principles of religion and virtue are inculcated as frequently and earnestly by our ministers both in public and private, and if the conduct of our societies be considered, with as good effect as by the clergy of the established church.* So that if the matter be viewed in this light, the claim of a monopoly of civil offices falls to the ground.†

Allow us to mention one reason more which powerfully influences us to seek a Repeal of these Acts. It is a reason which we offer not as Dissenters only but as Christians, and

* When a Dissenter is guilty of a crime, the blame is usually thrown on the whole body. That there are bad people in our congregations we do not deny; and if their wickedness flowed from the principles which we maintain and teach, we must acknowledge ourselves to be the cause, and that we are justly chargeable with their guilt. But if, as the case really is, their wickedness proceeds from acting in direct opposition to our principles, we are not to blame: They alone must bear their sin. We see many bad people of the established church: But we should think that we betrayed unpardonable ignorance, bigotry, and illiberality, if we threw the blame on the whole body of the Church of England; because we know, that their bad conduct does not arise from the principles of the church, but from acting in direct opposition to them. Pardon us then, if we conceive the epithets just mentioned, exceedingly applicable to those who charge our principles and our community with the faults of individuals. Was Christ to blame for the treachery of Judas?

† One important consequence resulting from our present application to parliament will be a display of the spirit of the Church of England: And we shall have an opportunity of comparing it with the conduct of other churches both Protestant and Catholic. The Presbyterian Church of Scotland admits all Protestants to offices without a test. The Episcopalian Church of Ireland has of late left places of trust accessible to Protestant Dissenters. The Catholic Church of France has thrown open the doors of preferment to Protestants, as well as to members of the Church of Rome. The Presbyterians and Independants in America have displayed a conduct that is new in the history of the world. Though by much the largest body they have not even established themselves, but have been contented to place themselves on an equality with those of the Episcopal communion, and other sects. With such examples of moderation before their eyes, we shall see the conduct of the Church of England: Whatever it may be, we shall receive from it much instruction;

which

which would have equal force if Dissenters did not exist : Namely, that to make the receiving of the Sacrament a qualification for the holding of civil and military offices is an impious profanation of one of the most solemn ordinances of the christian religion. The New Testament instructs us that our blessed Saviour when he instituted the Sacrament said to the Disciples, " Do this in remembrance of me." And when we approach the Lord's Table, it should be to remember his death, to express our faith in him as our Saviour, with gratitude to acknowledge our obligations to him, and to declare our purposes of obedience to his commands. Its design is entirely of a religious nature. The objects to which it directs our minds are wholly spiritual, the pardon of sin, the hope of the Divine favour, and the expectation of future blessedness. The disposition of mind which it requires, is composed of penitence and devotion. The world is removed by it entirely from our view. Such is the doctrine of the New Testament. Compare with this, the design and use of the Lord's Supper, as it forms a part of the Corporation and Test Act : And the difference is so great, that it must shock every person whom custom has not familiarized to the idea. It is to qualify a man for gauging beer barrels and soap boilers ; for giving orders to tell notes at the Bank, and sell tea at the India House ; for wearing a cutlafs, and carrying a spontoon, or a pair of colours ; in a word, for holding any civil or military office of honour, trust, or profit, under the government of Great Britain. The true end of the Sacrament relates entirely to Heaven : This relates wholly to earth.— That is entirely of a religious nature : This has nothing of religion in it at all. The one is to fit men for the receiving of spiritual blessings : The other is to fit them for a place under government in which they shall enjoy some temporal benefits. The one is to qualify for a crown of glory in Heaven : The other is to qualify for an office in an English borough or in the excise. The one end was appointed by Jesus Christ as head of his church : The other was appointed by Charles II. and the Lords and Commons of England. The one was for the honour of God, and the benefit of all true Christians : The other was to make the throne stand firm under the House of Stuart, and for the advantage of all those who had interest with the King, his ministers or mistresses, &c. to procure a lucrative office. Jesus Christ instituted the Sacrament as an ordinance of his kingdom,

which

which is not of this world: The legislature of England made it the tool and engine of a state which is entirely of this world. Jesus Christ commands his faithful Disciples and sincere penitents alone to receive the sacred ordinance: The Parliament of England commands every Atheist and Deist, every debauchee and scoffer at religion, every drunkard and adulterer, who through his interest has obtained an office, to come and kneel at the table of the Lord. If we see a person approach the Sacrament with the disposition required in the gospel, it is to obey the command of God and express his obligation to his Saviour: If on the contrary he go under the influence of the Corporation and Test Acts, it is to obey the command of the King, Lords, and Commons of Great Britain, and to prevent the incurring of those penalties, to which his acceptance of an office would otherwise expose him. If this plain view of the case be not sufficient to shew the gross profanation of the Lord's Supper, the mind must be accustomed to reconcile things that are in their nature the most opposite. To bring down the ends of a divine ordinance from Heaven to earth; instead of the honour of Christ to put the acquisition of an office; instead of spiritual benefits to substitute worldly gain; instead of confining the ordinance to the true disciples of Christ, to oblige despisers of Christianity to receive it, manifests such a prostitution of the holy Sacrament, and such an instance of sacrilege as may justly shock every pious mind.

It is obvious to all who are extensively acquainted with the sentiments of the nation, that a very considerable number of people makes no profession of religion. Many deny the truth of Christianity; many ridicule and deride a life of true piety; many think nothing at all about the matter. These have interest as well as others; and they accordingly are appointed to public offices. Thousands of such persons meet with promotion every year: And the law commands them, to come to the Sacrament, as a qualification for holding their employment. There is something so dreadful in forcing all these infidels and profane people to come to the Lord's Table, that every man who is concerned for the honour of God and religion may well shudder at the aggravated guilt which they do thereby contract. Who forces them, it may be said? But as the venerable Hoadly observes, having their worldly all depending on their compliance, the Corporation and Test Acts lay them

them under a moral necessity of coming to the Sacrament, and so of eating and drinking judgment to themselves.— Without the moving power of these laws they would not have come. It was not the command of God that brought them to it; but the command of the state: Not the fear of God's anger if they staid away; but the fear of losing an office: Not the hope of the Divine favour; but the hope of enjoying a lucrative place.* It is granted that many who are appointed to offices, discover a greater boldness; and conscious of their unfitness for coming to the Table of the Lord, they hold them, but do not receive the Test. But it may be useful for them to consider the hazardous situation they are in, and the very great and serious evils to which they are exposed.†

It has been asserted with confidence that the legislature has a right to appoint what Test it thinks proper. But if the maxim be acknowledged good, that, *Nemo potest, quod non jure potest*, it will readily be granted, that Parliament, omnipotent as it is, has no right to demand as a qualification for offices, that men should violate the laws of God the King of Kings, and profane his sacred institutions. Nor is there the least necessity or occasion that they should.— There still remains an obligation sufficient to answer all the

* The situation of the clergy in consequence of these acts, we should conceive to be not very agreeable. Must it not give pain to a pious mind to dispense the holy sacrament to a deist or a rake? The liturgy enjoins them to reject all evil doers: The parliament commands to admit them. If they imagine themselves at liberty, why do they never refuse a notorious transgressor, when he comes to qualify? But to suppose that when the King calls a man to the office of first Lord of the Treasury, it is in the power of a curate or vicar to defeat his choice, needs only to be mentioned; confusion follows of course. It is astonishing that the clergy never applied for relief!

† Commissioned officers in the navy and army, as well as others who hold offices under the Test Act, if they have not qualified, are every day exposed to the malice of an enemy who may recover from them the sum of five hundred pounds on barely suing for it. A person without a conscience might soon make a fortune, in this way. Nor is this all. If they have received an injury and sue a person at law, a stop may instantly be put to the proceedings, if this objection be adduced. Besides if a friend has left them a legacy, the next heir may if he pleases, detain it from them; and they have no remedy at law. Acts of indemnity extend only to the time when they are made. A week afterwards, gentlemen are liable to all these serious evils. What then should be done? Go to the sacrament? If any of them do not repent of their sin and purpose to live a holy life, let not brave men turn hypocrites. It would be more manly to join as a body, and petition parliament for relief.

purposes of human government: I mean the obligation of an *oath*. This is the instrument which all ages, and all nations under every system of religion have employed to bind society together, and to ensure the fidelity of those whom they wished to attach by the most powerful tie. It seems peculiarly adapted for the use of civil communities; and may be taken by Pagans, Mahometans, Deists and Jews as well as by Christians. Let none suppose that while we seek to have the acts repealed which enjoin the receiving of the Sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England, we wish to have the power of dispensing it as a qualification for offices, in our own places of worship. God forbid.— We should consider that obligation as a tenfold greater grievance than what we now complain of. We wish it entirely removed, that the crying profanation of the Sacrament may cease. And when it is removed, let none imagine that the fence of the Church is broken down. Oaths and declarations which the wisdom of Parliament has appointed to be taken by those who hold offices under government, still remain; and they give as much security to the established Church as she enjoyed before.* This is an assertion not founded on speculation, but supported by long experience. These oaths and declarations are all the security that the state demands of those who have a seat in Parliament; and have they not been found, by the experience of more than a century, to answer every necessary purpose, as effectually as the Sacramental Test? If therefore they have been sufficient to bind the legislative body, in which the nation reposes by far the greatest degree of trust, may not the same method be fully effectual in regard to the executive departments of the state, which are of far less consequence, and are besides under the controul of specific laws and regulations? A stop will hereby be put to the profanation of the Lord's Supper by authority; and the anger of God against us on that account will cease. The subject has been too seldom considered in this point of view. But if we believe that God regards the honour and purity of his institutions, we have reason to tremble. Of old when the profane conduct of Eli's sons made the sacrifice of the Lord to be abhorred, the Divine Majesty was so much offended that he

* Every conscientious man is completely bound by an oath; there is no need of any additional obligation: And will the Sacrament bind him who is so void of conscience as to break his oath?

solemnly declared the iniquity of Eli's house should not be removed by sacrifice nor offering for ever. If the institutions of the Gospel be as dear to him as those of the Mosaic Economy, must he not be highly displeased with those who, however exalted their rank may be, prostitute the Holy Sacrament from its own proper end to an ignoble purpose; and debase a divine institution by making it a political tool and an engine of state.

These are some of the reasons which induce us to seek a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts. Perhaps our intended application to Parliament may not be crowned with success; but a refusal will neither disappoint nor discourage us. We have not yet heard any thing produced by our opponents, but what serves to confirm us in our judgment, that our cause is good, and that we have reason on our side.* We are therefore determined to persevere, and in the use of every peaceable and constitutional method to seek relief. Sooner or later, from the decline of prejudice, and the encrease of moderation, a favourable opportunity may arise: We will improve it and obtain our wish. And when it is obtained, the consequences will be both important and pleasing. Injury will be sustained by none. But the constitution will be improved; the state will be strengthened; the church will remain in the enjoyment of all her dignities, with the additional happiness of being freed from a disagreeable task, and of attaching the Dissenters more strongly to her; the ordinances of God will cease to be profaned by the public authority of the laws, and we may hope for a larger measure of the blessing of that God who hath solemnly declared: "Them that honour me I will honour; but those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

* They who wish to see the subject fully investigated, may consult Bishop Sherlock who wrote against the Repeal of the Test and Hoadly Bishop of Winchester who published an answer to Sherlock, and was a strenuous advocate for the Repeal. The History of the Test is given at considerable length in a Pamphlet lately published, entitled: *The Rights of Protestant Dissenters to a complete Toleration asserted. By a Layman. Printed for Johnson.* We wish persons to read on both sides of the question, and to observe on which side impartiality, candour, force of reasoning, and the principles of civil and religious liberty are to be found.

F I N I S .



